

BEER

COASTAL COMMUNITY TEAM



ECONOMIC PLAN

January 2016

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Executive Summary

1. Beer is a beautiful village in East Devon, 20 miles east of Exeter and 10 miles south of Honiton. It sits on the Jurassic Coast, on a spectacular stretch of the South West Coastal Path. Beer life centres on its beach, for both locals and its many visitors. The steep shingle beach is sheltered and good for swimming. It is also a working beach; there is a small active fishing community, with freshly caught fish and seafood available to buy just off the beach.
2. The village's population has been a stable 1300 for several decades. The population is quite elderly, with approaching 40% of residents of retirement age. There is a house affordability issue, which makes it difficult for families with children to live there. Unemployment is very low, but this does not mean that all residents are prosperous. Local jobs tend to be in the low paid service sector, with little job security. There is one employer of note, Pecorama Pleasure Gardens (with associated manufacturing and publishing companies), which employs around 100 full-time, year-round staff.
3. Beer has some remarkable strengths for a small village. Pride of place must go to beautiful Beer beach and the lovely ambience and timeless appeal of the village itself. The Beer to Branscombe stretch of the South West Coastal Path is renowned; and we have two family attractions, Pecorama Pleasure Gardens and Beer Quarry Caves, within the parish boundary.
4. There are weaknesses too: an over-reliance on the short summer season, traffic and parking issues, a lack of affordable housing and limited employment opportunities.
5. We have identified **five economic priorities** that will continue to make Beer a great place to live, to work and to visit or use as a holiday base:
 - Strengthening of the off-season economy and local enterprise
 - Enhancement of Beer beach and approaches
 - Enhancement of Jubilee Gardens and the Cliff Top car park
 - Enhancement of attractions
 - Improvement and marketing of Beer's footpath network
6. **Seven specific 'medium-term initiatives'** are proposed to address these economic priorities. These are detailed in Section 5.2. We estimate their likely cost range, their ability to generate new jobs and their potential payback to the local economy.
7. On the basis of further discussion and consultation with the community and visitors, the CCT's intention is to draw up a more selective shortlist. Once agreed, we would then apply for feasibility study funding and gather detailed costing estimates. Funding applications for these shortlisted projects would then follow.
8. In addition to these large-scale projects, three short-term initiatives have been identified, on which the CCT intends to spend the remainder of the £10,000 'seed capital' already granted (see Section 5.3).

1. Introduction

Background

The Beer Coastal Community Team (CCT) is one of 116 Coastal Community Teams that have been set up nationally. These have been formed to take control of coastal community regeneration across Britain. There are a number of other CCTs nearby, including Exe Estuary, Exmouth in Devon and Lyme Regis in Dorset.

CCTs are important. The intention is that they will remain active for at least the duration of this Parliament. They will have access to substantial funds, including the £90m Coastal Community Fund, which plans to begin releasing money in 2017.

They are seen as a conduit for channelling regeneration funds in areas such as:

- Enhancing the attractiveness and accessibility of public areas
- Providing increased community facilities
- Promoting the visitor economy
- Encouraging sustainable uses of heritage/cultural assets
- Creating links to support the growth and performance of the retail sector.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has mandated that each CCT submits an economic plan by the end of January 2016. This document is the plan for Beer. We welcome the opportunity to submit this plan, and put forward its proposals for how our area can benefit from this initiative.

The plan will cover three major issues:

1. Information on the needs of the area and the challenges it faces, particularly with respect to the local economy
2. Our analysis of the strategic issues that need to be addressed to ensure Beer's continued prosperity
3. A list of tangible initiatives that the local community in Beer would like to see happen, with associated rationale.

This plan is intended to be a living document, and will be updated periodically.

2. About Beer

Geography and History

The picturesque historic fishing village of Beer sits along a steep-sided valley to the sea. Beer is in East Devon on Lyme Bay, 20 miles east of Exeter and 10 miles south of Honiton. It is situated on the “Jurassic Coast”, England’s first natural World Heritage Site. It also lies on one of the most beautiful stretches of the South West Coastal Path.



Life in Beer has always been centred on the sea. There has been a strong fishing community for hundreds of years, taking advantage of the maritime protection offered by nearby Beer Head. Smugglers used the tiny coves and nearby caves to store their contraband. It is the birthplace of the notorious Jack Rattenbury, known as the Rob Roy of England. Beer has a long tradition of lacemaking, having provided the lace for Queen Victoria’s wedding dress. Lacemaking is still taught regularly in the village.

There is no harbour in Beer, so the village’s focal point is its beach. Beer Beach is surrounded by picturesque white chalk cliffs which provide a natural suntrap. It is still a working beach – there is an active fishing fleet whose much-photographed boats are winched up the beach after use. Visitors can buy locally caught fish and crabs directly from a fisherman’s fish shop.

Leading down to the beach is Fore Street, Beer’s main thoroughfare. A major feature is a stream, The Brook, which runs alongside the street in a gully. Beer is fortunate to have good local facilities and services, including a post office, meeting hall, churches, doctor’s surgery, a pharmacy, school, clubs, two hotel pubs, a third pub and numerous restaurants. There is strong community participation with active clubs, organisation committees and Beer Parish Council (BPC). The village also benefits from a good range of small shops such as groceries, deli,

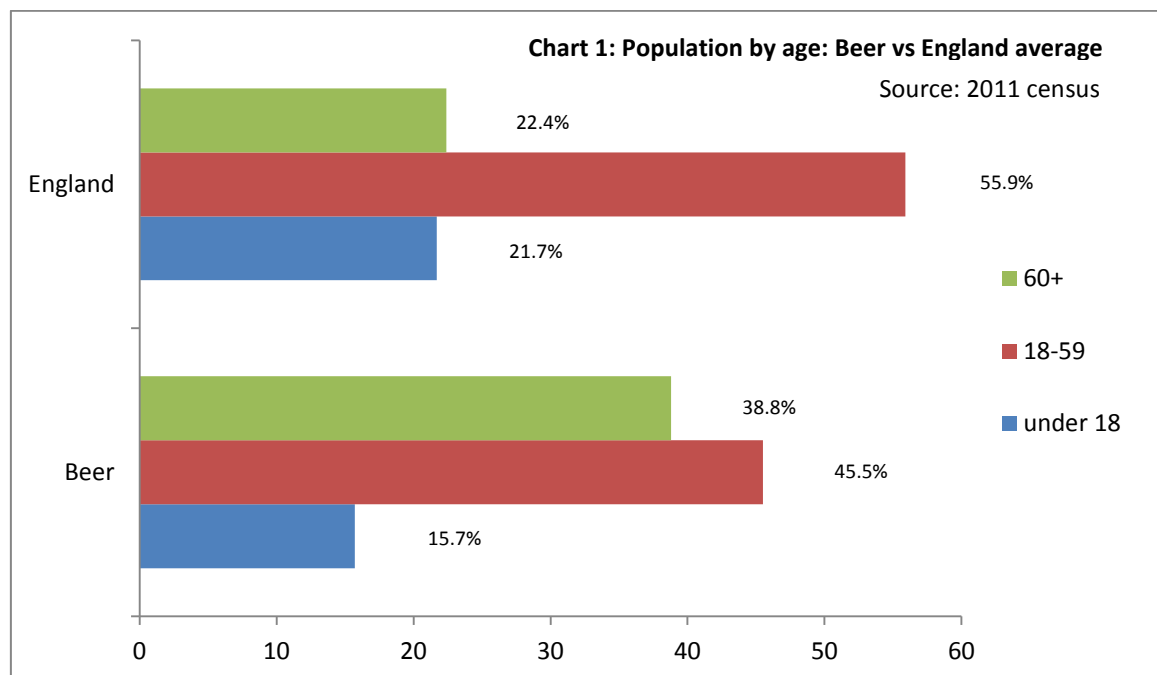
ice cream, newsagents, off-licence, fish and chips, art galleries, outdoor clothing, fashion clothing, estate agent, holiday rentals, post office and tourist souvenirs.

In addition to the beach and great walking, Beer has two family attractions situated a short walk from the village centre: Pecorama, with its famous light railway, and Beer Quarry Caves, a cavern complex that has been quarried since Roman times.

Population

The village contains around 600 households, with a total population of 1300. Population levels have been fairly stable for the last half-century.

Beer has an elderly population profile. As Chart 1 illustrates, nearly 40% of the resident population is aged 60 or over – almost double the national average (22%), and much higher than Devon as a whole (30%). This reflects the popularity of the town as a place to retire to.



Beer's population is becoming more elderly. Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the percentage of its population aged 60 and over rose from 31.7% to 38.8%. There was a decline in the percentage of under 18s from 18.7% to 15.7%. There was also a fall in the number of those aged 18-59, from an already low figure. House prices in the area are high, all of which points to an affordable housing issue for families. The community has started to address this shortage through the formation of a CLT and the building of 7 affordable homes in 2015.

In common with this part of rural Devon, the population is not ethnically diverse.

Economy and Transport

Beer has a high proportion of jobs in the service sector, typical of a coastal tourist village. Employment levels are high, but many jobs are low paid, with little or no job security. Jobs are readily available in summer, when the small businesses around the village gear up for the seasonal influx of tourists. Pecorama Pleasure Gardens employs 10 permanent staff in its leisure park over the winter months, rising to 40 in the height of summer.

There is one large employer in the village, which is Pecorama. It has three elements to its business; a model railway manufacturing site, employing 70 people; a publishing company, employing 15 staff; and the aforementioned pleasure gardens.



In part due to poor public transport provision, cars – and therefore the road transport network – are especially important to the village. Around 90% of Beer households own a car. Cars are vital for both work and for shopping; around half of those living in the village who work do so outside the village. Although day-to-day shopping in Beer is quite good, the weekly grocery shop has to be done elsewhere – most likely in nearby Seaton.

Beer is situated a little over a mile from the A3052, the main coast road which leads west to Sidmouth and ultimately to Exeter, and east into Dorset. The roads linking the village to the A3052 are narrow and winding in parts, as is the road that links Beer to Seaton. This causes traffic congestion in the summer months. Virtually all tourists that visit Beer arrive by car.

Public transport links are limited. Beer is served by two bus routes; the 899 that links Beer to nearby Seaton and Sidmouth, and the X53 that goes along the coast. The Beer Parish Survey showed that nearly everyone in the village saw the bus service as being vital to the village's prosperity, with around a third of villagers using it on a regular basis. The X53 is also used extensively in the summer months by walkers for dropping off or returning from a coast walk.

The nearest train station is in Axminster, eight miles away. Axminster links with Exeter and with London, a three hour journey away.

3. Policy Context

Policy and Programme Context

This economic plan needs to sit within the framework of economic, social and physical policies, plans, funding programmes and to integrate with the key values and policies embedded in a range of national and local strategies and area programmes. These include:

- Heart of South West Strategic Economic Plan 2014 – 2030 and the emerging devolution proposals.
- East Devon Local Plan
- Beer Neighbourhood Plan

Heart of South West LEP

The Heart of The South West Local Enterprise Partnership covers Devon and Somerset, and is the body that leads on creating an economic plan for our area. The region faces some key challenges: growth levels, and productivity, and well below average for the UK.

It has put together a Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Devon and Somerset, which was submitted to Government in 2014. This plan identifies three key priorities:

- Creating the conditions for (economic) growth
- Maximising productivity and employment
- Capitalising on our distinctive assets

Arising from these, five 'solutions' are proposed:

- Transformational connectivity to compete on the global stage
- Unlocking housing and employment land growth
- Investing in our people
- An exemplar growth hub and support for business
- Exploiting our transformational assets

Even putting aside the business jargon used in the LEP, it is hard to relate any of the solutions put forward to a village such as Beer. It feels like there is a huge gap between the LEP's focus and a village such as ours. This makes the Coastal Community Team opportunity even more important for Beer.

East Devon Local Plan

The 'new East Devon Local Plan 2006 – 2026' has a major focus on housing and growth. It also references the East Devon tourism industry, with explicit support for building of an all-year round tourism trade.

Local Plans

A Beer Neighbourhood Plan is in the process of being compiled. Whilst it is not yet publicly available, the Local Evidence Report, on which the plan is being based, has been published in draft form. It is available via the Beer Parish Council website

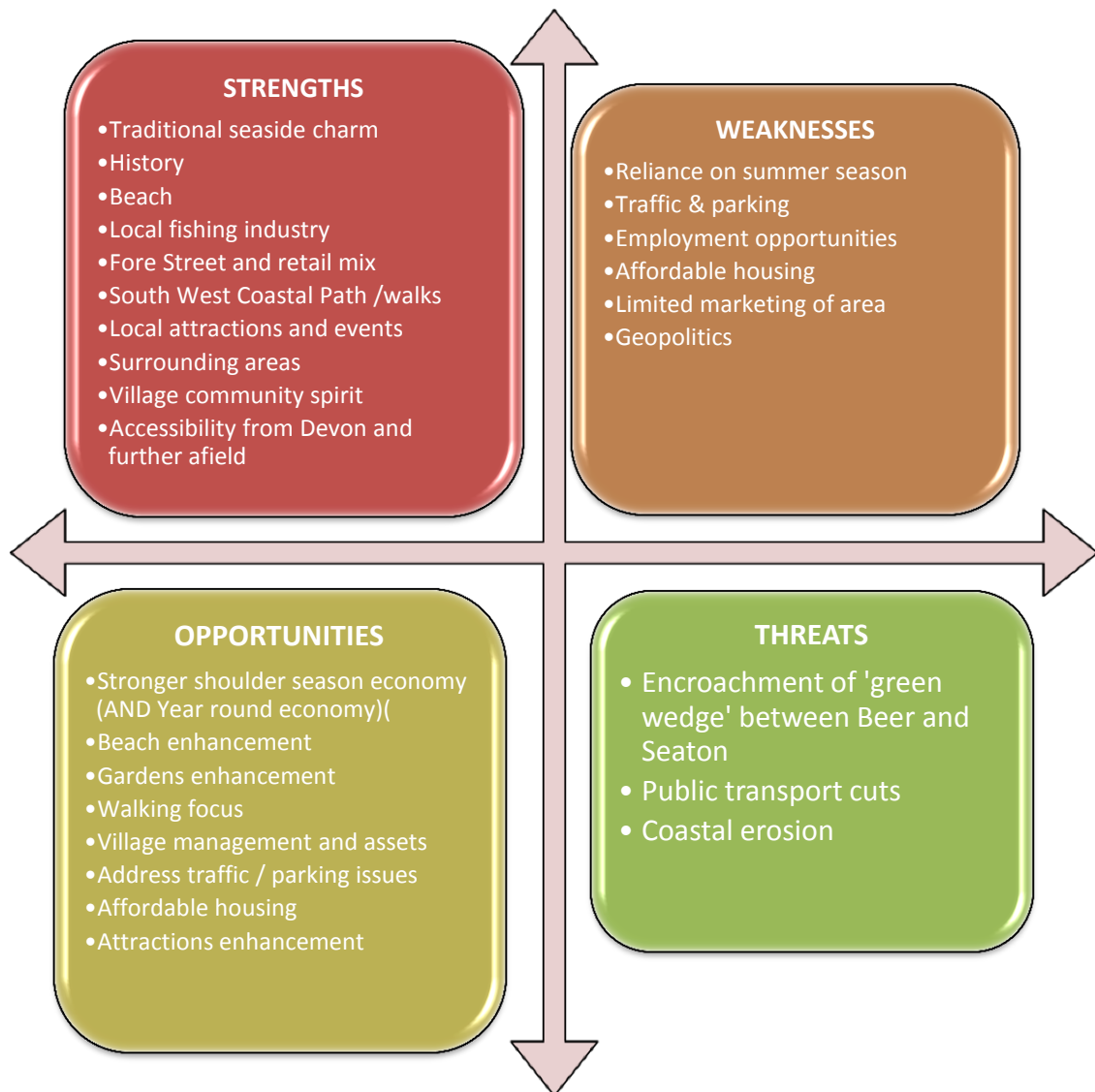
http://www.sitesplus.co.uk/user_docs/924/File/Beer%20Neighbourhood%20Plan%20Local%20Evidence%20Report%20-%20November%202014.pdf

It is hoped that the Beer Neighbourhood Plan will be adopted by the end of 2016.

4. Economic analysis

4.1 SWOT analysis

It is instructive to consider the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Beer.



Strengths

1. Traditional seaside charm

Beer is a traditional, 'old-fashioned' coastal village. Many visitors remark that Beer reminds them of the British seaside holidays of their childhoods – a beautiful flint stone village beside a lovely working beach with lots happening. But the attraction is as much about the *type* of place that Beer is, as its beauty; a village where the locals are helpful and friendly towards visitors, where everyone knows everyone else and where the pace of life is slower.

This 'magic' is a little hard to pin down, but incredibly valuable, for both locals and tourists.

2. History

Beer's history is intriguing for visitors, with tales of hidden coves, smugglers and contraband, the Spanish 'invasion' of the 1600s, Beer stone and Beer lace. The village already plays on its history and environmental importance, telling its story in the community-led Fine Foundation Centre on the beach.

3. The beach

Beer beach is the jewel in Beer's crown and the focal point of the village. Virtually all visitors will visit the beach at some point, either to swim, to walk or to have refreshments at one of the three beach cafes that ply their trade during the April – September season. It is also, of course, much loved and used by locals. For many incomers, the beach is likely to be one of the main reasons for choosing to come and live in Beer.

Beer has a popular sailing club, based in a purpose-built modern building overlooking the beach. It specialises in dinghy racing, and has hosted world championship events.

Tidal movement of shingle has caused the beach to grow in size markedly in the last 25 years. In many ways this is a good thing – it can now accommodate more people, boats and activities. However, it also brings issues; the shingle shelves steeply at the sea edge (it is levelled by tractor during summer season) and swimming off the beach has consequently become harder, especially for young children and the elderly.

As the beach is our greatest asset, we are keen to improve it further – see 'opportunities'.



4. The fishing industry

Beer beach is a working beach; a small fleet of fishing boats operates throughout the year, catching mostly mackerel, crab and lobster. The catch is available for sale at a shop just off the beach.



There is no harbour in Beer, so the boats are winched up the beach on cables after use. The fishing activity not only provides employment and helps to carry on a centuries'-old tradition that locals are immensely proud of; it also adds greatly to the visitor experience, adding life to the beach.

5. Fore Street and the retail mix

Beer is a beautiful village, with many attractive buildings. At its centre lies Fore Street, the main road that leads down to the beach. Fore Street is both attractive and functional. There is a good mix of shops selling useful items (Post Office / general stores, pharmacy), social outlets (pubs, hotels) and outlets catering mainly for the tourist trade (for example, art galleries). Of particular note are the Marine House and the Steam Gallery, two of the leading fine art galleries in Devon.

6. South West Coastal Path and local village walks

The South West Coastal Path is a nationally renowned long-distance footpath. Beer is fortunate in lying on one of its most beautiful stretches. The walk from Beer west to the neighbouring village of Branscombe is popular and outstanding.

Beer is wonderful walking territory. The village is criss-crossed by paths and rights of way often known only to locals. These offer visitors further good walking opportunities, and can be developed into a visitor attraction in their own right.

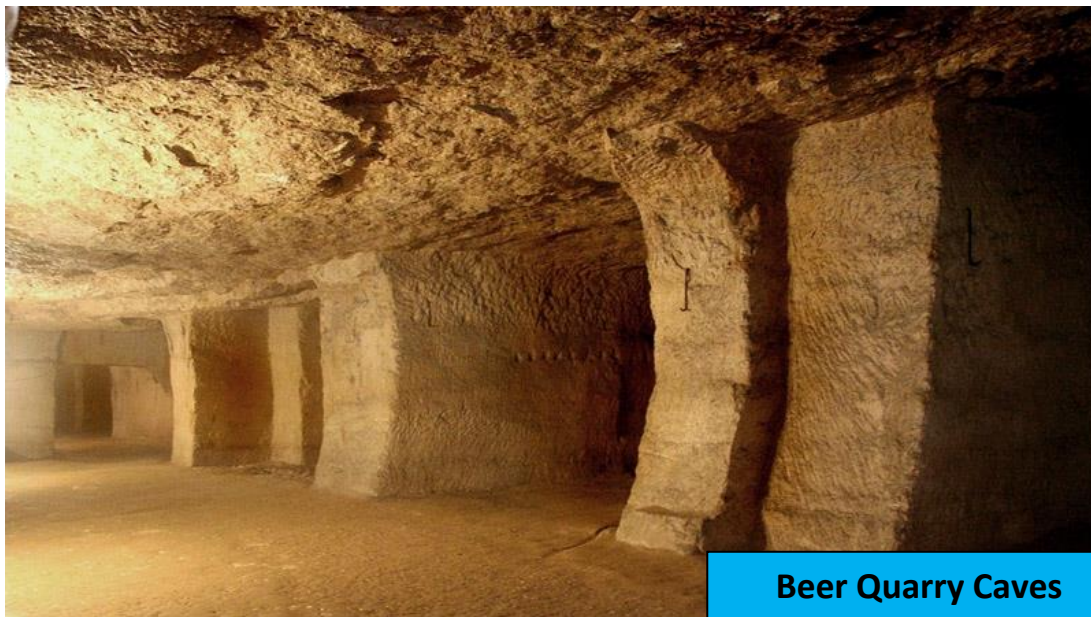
7. Local attractions and events

Unusually for a small village, Beer has two family attractions within its boundaries; Pecorama Pleasure Park and Beer Quarry Caves.

Pecorama Pleasure Park is one of East Devon's leading tourist attractions, bringing 70,000 visitors a year to Beer. Situated high on the hill above Beer village, it is most famous for the Beer Heights Light Railway, a miniature railway ride that is popular with all ages. Although busier in summer, Pecorama recently opened an indoor play area that has proved massively popular, helping to extend its season.



Beer Quarry Caves is a man-made cave system created by the quarrying of Beer stone, which dates back to Roman times. It attracts around 25,000 visitors a year. Guided tours of the extensive underground tunnels run through the April – September period. The caves are a Site of Special Scientific Interest, due to the Horseshoe Bats that hibernate there.



Beer organises two major events during the summer. The Beer Regatta is a week-long celebration in August each year. Although it is centred on sailing, it now extends to family sports day, barrel rolling, children's entertainment and many other family events.



The Beer Rhythm and Blues Music Festival runs across a weekend in October each year.

8. Surrounding areas

One of Beer's strengths is that it has many neighbouring towns and attractions that combine to make this part of East Devon / The Jurassic Coast particularly attractive.

West: Immediately to the west lies the pretty village of Branscombe, accessible via the South West Coastal Path. Beyond Branscombe lies the regency town of Sidmouth, nine miles away. Exeter is a forty five minute car journey.

East: to the east lies the bustling town of Seaton, home of the popular Seaton Tramway, the new Jurassic Centre and the Axe Wetland Reserve. Beyond Seaton, 10 miles away over the border in Dorset, lies Lyme Regis, famous for its Cobb and fossils.

North: to the north lies the market town of Axminster, with rural Somerset beyond.

9. Community spirit

Beer has a remarkable community spirit for a small village, as evidenced by the many clubs, societies and events that take place.

10. Access from Devon and further afield

Beer is an accessible village. There is an opportunity to attract local visitors from other parts of Devon – Exeter is only 20 miles away, with a population of 120,000.

East Devon is an accessible part of the West Country for London or Midlands visitors travelling by car. This offers Beer the opportunity to market itself as an easily reachable alternative to the 'picture postcard' villages in South Devon or Cornwall that are much further away.

Weaknesses

1. Reliance on the summer season

In common with most tourist-dependent villages, Beer is heavily reliant on the summer season. A number of village businesses either close down or operate limited opening times during the October – March period.

Whilst recognising that the summer focus is key, it is important for us to consider ways in which the village can be made livelier in the off season. This will benefit locals and make the village more attractive to visitors. In the local residents' survey 71% were in favour of exploring ways to increase the length of the tourist season.

2. Traffic and parking

Access roads to Beer are narrow in places, meaning that care needs to be taken when driving. Village roads are also narrow and restrictive.

There are three municipal car parks in Beer plus additional parking at Pecorama and at Beer Quarry Caves. The main Central car park on Clapp's Lane, with parking for 220 vehicles, will often be full by mid-morning in summer. Parking is a contentious issue locally, with residents divided on whether the village needs more parking or transport from the cliff top carpark.

3. Employment opportunities

Employment opportunities in Beer are limited. Many jobs are part-time, low paid and with little job security. In the resident's survey, 90% wanted to see more local jobs created, and 92% supported better local job opportunities for young people.

4. Affordable housing

Beer Parish Council (BPC) has identified a lack of affordable housing, particularly for families with children as a key issue. The local community seeks a balance of increased housing provision while maintaining the special ambience of Beer village that is so valued by locals and visitors. There has been progress on this issue. In early 2015, Beer Community Land Trust completed seven new affordable dwellings on the edge of the village.

5. Limited marketing the area

Our part of Devon is not marketed well. The main 'Visit Devon' website hardly mentions East Devon, and Beer itself is not mentioned at all! Part of the issue seems to be that no-one knows what this area should be called – is it East Devon, or Lyme Bay, or The Jurassic Coast?

6. Geopolitics

Beer suffers by virtue of its physical distance from the 'power centres' of Devon local politics. The SEP for Devon and Somerset virtually ignores our area, and underplays the crucial role of tourism to the local economy.

Opportunities

1. Stronger shoulder season economy (and year-round economy)

A stronger shoulder season economy would bring clear economic and social benefits; more local jobs, better facilities and more visitors to the village. One of our local attractions, Pecorama, has shown with its new indoor soft play area how it can dramatically increase its appeal in poor weather and off-season. In section 5 we will put forward some proposals to increase Beer's appeal as a 'year-round' destination.

2. Beach enhancement

Although Beer beach is a wonderful asset to the village, there are ways in which it can be made even better for locals and visitors alike.

3. Gardens enhancement

Jubilee Gardens, situated on the hill on the east overlooking Beer beach, are a major asset to the village. Attractive as they are, more can be done to enhance their appeal

4. Walking focus

Beer offers some wonderful walks, both on the South West Coastal Path and around the village. There is an opportunity to improve rights of way further, so we make it easier for visitors to walk between Beer village, Pecorama and Beer Quarry Caves. There is also an opportunity to market the local walks better, with a leaflet / display and stronger signage.

5. Village management and assets

East Devon District Council (EDDC) currently owns a number of key assets in Beer, including the beach and its associated concessions, licences and leases, the Cliff Top Car Park at Beer Head and Central Car Park off Clapp's Lane. Beer Parish Council is in negotiation with EDDC for the transfer of some of these assets to local control. This would transform BPC, giving it the opportunity to manage the operation and development of key property assets and provide an income base for the first time. The transfer asset plan is appended to this economic plan for information.

6. Address traffic / parking issues

BPC has commissioned a traffic study, which is due to report back later in 2016. This will be used as a basis for action in this area.

7. Affordable housing

As already mentioned, BPC has been active in this area in recent years. It is currently in discussion with a third party about a partnership development within the Beer parish boundary.

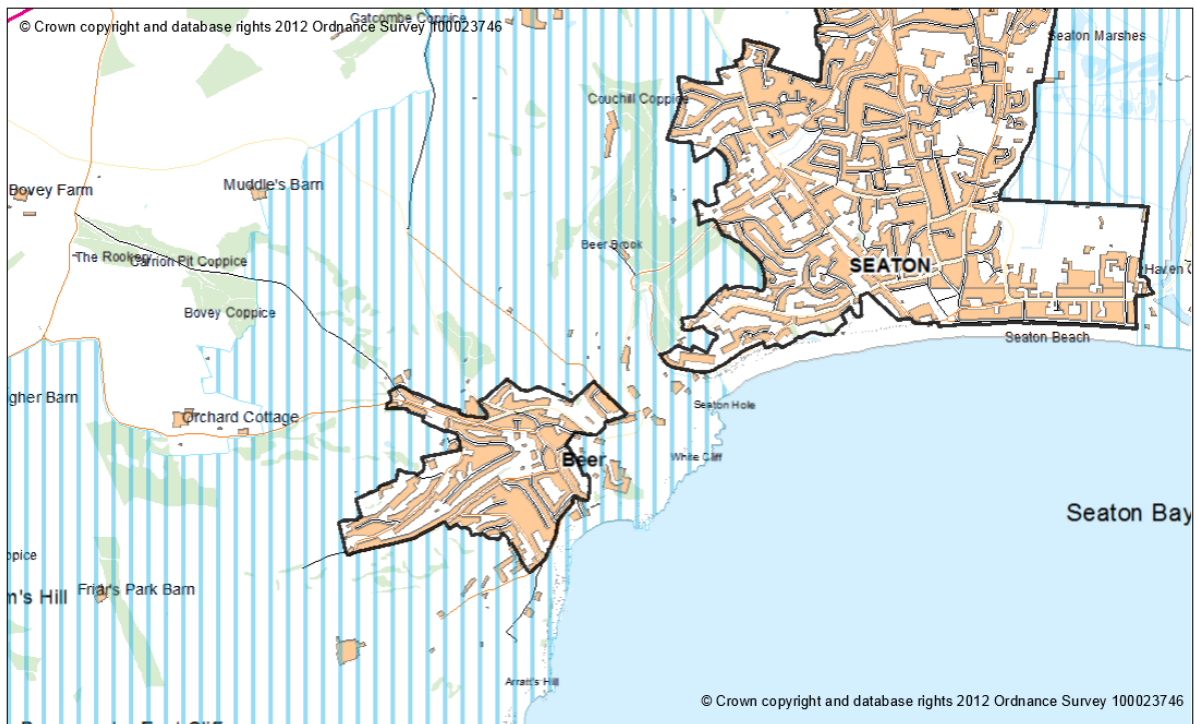
8. Attractions enhancement

Beer Quarry Caves is a key local attraction. It is in the process of gaining charitable status, and is keen on building a Visitor and Interpretation Centre to enhance its appeal.

Threats

1. Encroachment of the 'green wedge' between Seaton and Beer

There is only a small 'green wedge' separating Beer from its larger eastern neighbour of Seaton (see map below). It is critical to Beer's character and appeal that this separation is maintained. This is recognised in the local residents' survey, where over 90% regard this as 'important'.



2. Public transport cuts

Although most residents have cars, some residents – particularly those who are elderly – are dependent on public transport for their shopping and other needs. Any cutbacks to the bus service would have a severe effect on them. It would also affect visiting walkers, who use buses for drop-off and pick-up around their use of the South West Coastal Path.

3. Coastal erosion

The local shoreline management plan designates Beer as “hold the line”. There is a substantial concrete groyne off the beach that offers protection against the sea.

The local chalk cliffs are resistant to erosion, with no major incidents in the recent past. The cliffs around the beach are netted to offer protection against minor stone falls. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency, and vigilance is necessary.

4.2 Economic Strategy

Flowing from the SWOT analysis, we have identified **five strategic priorities** that underpin Beer's economic strategy. Our aims are threefold; to make Beer a **better place to live**, a **better place to work** and a **better place to visit / centre a holiday**.

We will consider these priorities in turn. This then leads on to a list of tangible things that we want to do – our key short-term and medium-term initiatives – that are covered in Section 5.

1. Strengthening the off-season economy and supporting local enterprise

Beer is a popular tourist destination during July and August, together with sunny weekends and school holidays between April and October.

Whilst we recognise the key importance of the summer season, we want to extend our popularity into the shoulder season, making Beer a popular destination all year round. This will help us to secure full-time, year-round jobs in the local economy.

We recognise the importance of commercial fishing to Beer in providing employment, making the beach a vibrant place and in preserving the character of the village. Restoration of the fishermen's buildings will both improve the commercial viability of the fishing industry and provide a new tourist-centred focus for Beer beach.

We also need to increase visitors' dwell time in the village giving them more reason to want to stay. By improving the scope and quality of facilities and events visitors will be encouraged to stay longer, return, recommend to others and ultimately spend more.

2. Enhancement of Beer beach and approaches

The beach is the village's main draw and its prize asset. Anything that we can do to further enhance its appeal is clearly a key priority. There are two areas of focus; improvement of facilities to make the beach more attractive to tourists; and restoration of the historic buildings to give fishermen and other businesses the opportunity to augment their primary activity and enhance the visitor experience.

In section 5, we outline a series of potential projects, some ambitious and some smaller, to make Beer beach even better.

3. Enhancement of Jubilee Gardens and the Cliff top car park

Overlooking the beach, Jubilee Gardens already has wonderful views and a number of attractive assets. We believe that with appropriate improvement, it can be an even bigger asset to Beer.

The Cliff Top car park at Beer Head is both an overflow for the central carpark and a popular choice for those visitors wanting to walk the coast path. Facilities for families, walkers and camper vans can be improved, making it more attractive.

4. Enhancement of visitor attractions

Pecorama and Beer Quarry Caves are both important to Beer's economy. Beer Quarry Caves' transition to charitable status will allow us to put forward proposals to enhance the asset for the benefit of the village.

5. Improvement and marketing of Beer's footpath network

Beer is well-known as a base for great coastal walking. What is less well-known is the great walking around the village itself using the extensive footpath network. This will be improved further and marketed as an attraction in its own right, allowing us to promote Beer as a base for walking tourism to local attractions and nearby towns and villages. The beach, Pecorama and the Quarry Caves in Beer together with the Jurassic Centre, Tramway and Axe Wetlands Reserve in Seaton can all then be promoted to visitors using Beer as a base.



5. Key initiatives

5.1 Overview

We have drawn up a 'shortlist' of short-term (achievable in 6-12 month timeframe) and medium-term projects (bigger projects, taking a minimum of 12 months); these are presented in the following sections.

5.2 Medium-term initiatives

Seven priority projects have been identified. These are NOT in any priority order.

Initiative	Strategic fit ^a	Economic boost est ^b	Job creation potential ^c	Cost est ^d
1. Beach enhancement: fishermen's buildings' development	1,2	£££	***	£££
2. Beach enhancement: development of Charlie's Yard	1.2	££/£££	*/***	££ / £££
3. Beach enhancement: other improvements	1,2	££		£
4. Jubilee Gardens and Cliff Top car park enhancements	3	£		££
5. Beer Quarry Caves visitor centre	1,4	££	*	£££
6. Walking network: improvement and marketing	1,5	££		£
7. Events and marketing	1,2	££	*	£

^a Strategic fit: 1= Year-round economy, 2= Sea-front, 3= Gardens, 4= Attractions, 5 = Events / Marketing

^b Estimate of the economic boost provided to the area: £ high: ££ very high: £££ extremely high

^c Estimate of number of FTE jobs created: * low: ** moderate: *** high

^d Guideline cost estimate: £= under £100k, ££ = £100k-£250k: £££= more than £250k

Each of these initiatives is considered in turn overleaf:

1. Beach enhancement: fishermen's buildings' development

Beer beach is accessed via a short, steep road. Immediately to its left is a set of old fishermen's buildings (pictured below), currently owned by East Devon Fishermen's Association. They are either empty or are used for storage of fishing equipment. This set of buildings is in an ideal area for redevelopment and regeneration.

The Beer CCT proposes a restoration project for these buildings. Some would be retained by the fishermen supporting their fishing activity; others could be sub-let to appropriate food, craft, art or sports retailers. This would create local jobs and provide a vibrant new attraction for Beer beach. The buildings would be protected for future generations, and ownership would be transferred to the community.



The road onto the beach is currently used for vehicles and walking access, with a number of parking spaces available (see photo above). Car parking excludes its use for other activities and detracts from the beautiful beach beyond. We would propose that vehicle access to the beach be restricted to dropping off of equipment and other essential trips. Parking might then be restricted to emergency vehicles and disabled bays only. Alternative parking related to fishing trips etc. could be provided in the nearby Beach Court car park, one of the assets that BPC is proposing taking control of from EDDC (see Appendix).

2. Beach enhancement: development of Charlie's Yard

On the right-hand (west) side of the beach slipway is a second under-utilised area. This space, called 'Charlie's Yard', is a large, (fairly) level space that is currently set aside for a picnic and seating area (a small part of it is covered).



The CCT is considering two options for this space:

Option 1: Partial redevelopment. Part of the area would be replaced by a building containing a kitchen, food serving area, bar area and toilet facilities. The remainder would be covered to make it suitable for all weather use. This would be made available as a 'pop-up' restaurant / bar space for village events, whilst maintaining the public access that makes this area popular with visitors.

Option 2: Full redevelopment. A larger building would contain a restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating. This would be owned by the community, and let out as a commercial restaurant. Given its prime location, we would expect to attract a high quality operation that would provide a visitor attraction for Beer, in the same way that Hix Oyster House attracts upmarket visitors all-year round to Langmoor Gardens in Lyme Regis. This would provide much-needed local employment, and the potential to be a 'magnet' for visitors in the summer, shoulder and off-seasons.

3. Beach enhancement: other improvements

The CCT intends to 'bundle up' a series of smaller scale enhancements to the Beer beach area. Details are still being considered, but these might include:

- A new handrail for the entrance road, enabling easier access.
- Smartening up of the beach huts
- A permanent concrete (or similar) path across the beach to improve access and appearance
- Shower facilities
- A landing stage, to improve swimming access to the sea
- A children's demountable paddling pool.

4. Jubilee Gardens and Cliff Top car park enhancements

The slope of Jubilee Gardens lends itself ideally to be an informal outdoor theatre / music venue. The CCT would like to contour the existing slope to allow for wooden seating and a small stage area that would facilitate shows.



Cliff Top car park is one of EDDC's assets that BPC is hoping to transfer. If successful, the car park will be improved by including parking for camper vans, a play area to make it more attractive to family visitors and information promoting local walking routes to local attractions.

5. Beer Quarry Caves Visitor Centre

Beer Quarry Caves is a unique local attraction, bringing around 25,000 visitors a year into Beer. The caves currently lack a Visitor Centre, where the remarkable history of the caves can be shown, finds can be displayed and the importance of its nature conservation can be presented.

The caves have drawn up plans for a Visitor Centre, and are discussing an application for funds with the Heritage Lottery Fund. The CCT is considering a joint bid for funds.

6. Walking network: improvement and marketing

Beer has a large network of local paths that criss-cross the village and parish. However, there is room for further improvement of this resource. For example, the Beer to Seaton footpath requires improvement, and there is a desire to create a new path linking Beer Quarry Caves with Pecorama (avoiding roads). This would require the permission of the local landowner, Clinton Devon Estates, who have indicated they are willing to work with BPC on this opportunity.

The CCT believes that a local footpath network could be an attraction for Beer in its own right if it is improved, well-signed and marketed the right way. We would like to see a village display showing the range of local walks available, the creation of a parish walking map and a digital 'app' to accompany this. We believe that Beer can be successfully marketed as a walking centre holiday destination.

7. Events and marketing

Beer already successfully runs two major events, Beer Regatta and the R'n'B Festival. There is a local appetite for more. Given the village name, location and the great local sea food provision, an obvious opportunity is to run a beer and seafood festival. Events such as these can prolong the tourist season, provide enjoyment to the local population and boost the village economy.

The CCT, in conjunction with BPC, is considering whether to include events and marketing co-ordination within its function. This role would take responsibility for making local events happen, harnessing volunteer resources and engaging with commercial operators.

5.3 Short term initiatives

The CCT has over £6,000 from the initial seed funding that can be spent in 2016. Two initiatives are being considered: commissioning a visitor survey; the addition of benches along Beer's footpath system; and adding a shower unit to the east side of the beach (there is already a shower facility on the west side).

6. Monitoring and review

This economic plan is an important document for Beer's businesses and residents. But it is also just a starting point. It will require management and monitoring to ensure that it is acted upon and remains relevant. This section outlines our approach to ensure that this happens.

Ongoing CCT role and co-ordination

Beer CCT will continue to exist and will meet up regularly. CCT members attend meetings on a voluntary basis, and will continue to do so. Beer CCTs membership has operated on an 'open' basis – meetings have been advertised in the village and everyone is welcome to participate. There have been very high levels of support, with meetings well attended. The CCT will continue to meet and operate in this way. Geoff Pook, who has acted as CCT co-ordinator, will continue to do so and be the main point of contact.

Short term goals and next steps

Following submission of the economic plan, the CCT will finalise its discussions on how to spend the remainder of the seed capital that has been provided.

7. CCT details and acknowledgements

Membership

The two permanent members of Beer CCT are Geoff Pook, BPC and EDDC Councillor: and Annie Dallaway: BPC Clerk.

Point of contact

Geoff Pook is the principal point of contact for Beer CCT:

gpook@eastdevon.gov.uk Tel: 07966 490429

Consultation and communication with community

Beer CCT has had a number of public meetings since September 2015. At the inaugural meeting in September, a brainstorming took place and all ideas for economic improvement were captured and circulated. This economic plan has been based on these suggestions and subsequent discussions.

There has been strong village support for the CCT. A large number of local businesses and community organisations have attended the meetings, including:

Colebrooke House, Osborne's, Beer Tiddlers, Beer Fishermen's Association, Beer Self-drive boats, Beer Fish & Chips, Beer Church & Regatta, Chapple's beach concession, The Dolphin Hotel, Beer Head Caravan Park, Jimmy Green retail clothing, The Village Hair Shoppe, Kenno's, Beer Village Heritage Centre, Clinton Devon Estates, Marine House & Steam Art Galleries, Ducky's beach cafe, Beer Fish Shop, Beer Head Bistro, Pecorama Pleasure Gardens, Beer RNLI, Beer Quarry Caves, Richard Scott Photos, Rock Villa Off Licence/Post Office, Woozie's Deli and Rockdale. Beer Sailing Club, Beer Football Club and Beer Social Club.

We would like to thank the management of Pecorama and John Scott of Beer Quarry Caves for having face-to-face meetings with us, and for their input.

About the author

This plan has been written by Philip George of Join the Dots Consulting. I would like to thank the Geoff Pook and the residents of Beer for their help with writing this plan.

www.jointhedotsconsulting.co.uk Tel: 07812 104550

Appendix

BPC is in discussion with EDDC about an asset transfer. Attached is a draft submission.

Transfer of assets to Beer Parish Council

Summary

Beer Parish Council (BPC) proposes that East Devon District Council (EDDC) transfers the land and building assets within the Parish of Beer currently owned and maintained by EDDC to the ownership and management of BPC.

The transfer will deliver a net saving to EDDC and will place additional responsibility and financial liability upon BPC. This in part will be offset by additional income to BPC enabling it to maintain and develop those discretionary services currently provided by EDDC. Whilst the financial aspects determine the overall viability to both parties it is the wider community benefit to Beer that is the primary reason for requesting the transfer.

Ownership and control of the physical, public assets within Beer and in particular the beach, foreshore, Jubilee gardens and Cliff Top carpark will enable the community of Beer, through BPC, to manage and promote the development of the public areas and deliver the relevant facilities and services required by visitors and residents alike to ensure the future commercial and social sustainability of the village.

Transfer of assets will bring additional benefits, responsibilities and liabilities. BPC accepts these and sees the process as an opportunity to increase its relevance to the community, giving the community more direct influence on how assets and affairs in the village are managed. The potential of a transfer has already engaged more people in the community and in the long term will result in a stronger, more relevant and able parish council.

The transfer proposal takes into consideration the expenditure and income potential at current values. The transfer will only be approved if it delivers a net saving to EDDC with a robust and viable business plan from BPC. Transferred assets will be subject to covenants and overages to ensure their future use and value to both Beer and the wider East Devon community is fully protected.

Beer, background and future

Beer as a village and community has many advantages. The beach and surrounding coastal walks make it an attractive holiday destination. The working fishing fleet and functional old style appearance of the beach, with its beach huts, cafes, deck chairs and self-drive boats gives a sense of timeless authenticity. The village has a range of pubs, restaurants and both tourist and essential shops, it has a thriving local school and the overall feel of a vibrant local community. In addition to the beach the area boasts national and internationally acclaimed attractions such as Pecorama and Beer Quarry caves, it is in the East Devon AONB and is an important element of the Jurassic Coast.

The summary of Beer is true but in some aspects dated. The village still receives a significant number of visitors but over a shorter season and actual time spent in Beer is reducing as visitors go to adjacent towns for additional attractions and entertainment. The community aspect is also under pressure as more homes are sold as second or holiday homes pricing out the potential for young, local full time residents.

The Parish Council has led a number of initiatives including the Neighbourhood Plan, and the Coastal Community Team project which has included community consultation. Directly and indirectly, an output common to all is that the village needs to make more of its primary asset, the beach and foreshore area without spoiling its charm and character. The intention is therefore to improve all round visitor attraction encouraging visitors to visit Beer throughout the year and spend longer in Beer when they visit.

The beach, fisherman shed area, Charlie's Yard, Jubilee Gardens and the Cliff Top car park are all central to this plan. With the exception of the fisherman's area, these all currently belong to EDDC. Improvement will entail changes and development including capital expenditure. BPC accepts that it cannot expect EDDC to commit to the level of financial expenditure required. BPC also wants any development to be controlled by BPC and the community as it feels they are best placed to understand what is required by visitors and the community alike.

The request to transfer the assets to BPC will therefore enable BPC to develop a scheme that will include capital development of the areas and changes to the management objectives with the aim of increasing the relevance and attraction of Beer as a tourist destination to visitors, residents and local businesses.

Transfer rationale

Based on current figures there is a net cost to EDDC for owning and maintaining assets in Beer of £12,000. This net cost includes the substantial income from the central car park. BPC predicts that they can manage the same asset base excluding the central car park at a lower cost and increase revenue through innovation. The net result to EDDC of the transfer will be the exchange of a net cost of £12,000 for a net income of £47,000 giving a net benefit to EDDC of £59,000.

BPC has prepared a complete schedule of assets currently owned and managed by EDDC based on EDDC records and data. The schedule has been reviewed by BPC to ensure it includes all known assets and services. The schedule of works has then been costed based on time and material predictions and known lump sums where applicable such as insurance. The costed schedule has been independently reviewed by a professional quantity surveying firm experienced in municipal maintenance works.

The schedule takes into consideration both costs and income earned by the assets based on the latest revenue data from EDDC with the exception of the Cliff top car park, this has been adjusted to the long term average. The financial argument for transfer from EDDC to BPC can then be justified as the elimination of a net cost through transfer of a liability.

The validity of the proposal to transfer assets to BPC is confirmed by the independent assessment of the operating costs together with the enhanced income if operated by BPC

augmented by an increase in the precept if necessary. The increase in precept would be justified by the overall benefit to Beer of owning and operating its own assets and services.

BPC recognises that the majority of the EDDC cost involved in assets is in labour and the transfer of responsibility will not initially eliminate these costs. The process should therefore be staged over a number of years and could include initial payments by BPC to EDDC for EDDC to continue to provide a service or even for there to be a transfer of staff from EDDC to BPC.

The assets to be transferred and reasons why are;

The beach. This is the major tourist attraction for Beer. However, there has been no investment or management input to improve it as a tourist attraction bringing it up to date with today's visitor expectations or other attractions in the locality. BPC has already progressed the CCT study and held initial public meetings and meetings with relevant parties to identify what improvements are both required and possible. Current income can be increased by basic rate increases as planned by EDDC, BPC would look to rate increases with other innovative ideas to increase revenue from the beach. The consensus is that the beach concessions need to offer the visitor more, access to the beach and sea needs to be improved and toilet facilities at beach level are needed.

Charlie's Yard and the fishermen's area These areas have significant potential if developed sympathetically to provide a multi-use semi all weather public area for retail and dining. Parking restrictions will improve the user friendliness and visual impact. Discussions with the Fishermen's association have been initiated and there is significant interest and potential to develop the whole area to be effectively "Beer Village Green".

The Jubilee Gardens and public toilets. The public gardens and children's play area hold a commanding view over the beach and could offer much more to visitors and locals alike. The elevated position is used almost like an amphitheatre for village events. With some sensitive development a facility that does not detract from the garden scene but could be used for village events and small concerts could be created.

The continued provision of existing toilet facilities and possibly provision of additional facilities on the beach and further up in the village is one of the highest profile issues in any public consultation. The lack of facilities higher in the village is considered to have a detrimental effect on tour visits by some operators. BPC will look at alternative options to improve toilet provision.

The Cliff Top car park The central carpark is the primary parking area in Beer and is not included in the transfer proposal. The Cliff Top car park provides important overflow resource in the height of the season and is the preferred parking for visitors wanting to walk the coast path or picnic. It is underutilised and could provide visitors with more than just a place to leave the car.

BPC has initiated discussion with Pecorama and Beer Quarry Caves and sees potential in enhancing the existing network of footpaths around the parish to encourage people to walk to attractions taking more advantage of the natural beauty of the area. There may be additional opportunities to link with Seaton Jurassic Centre, the wetlands and the tramway all from Beer.

Minor development of the car park to make it more attractive to families could result in better use and extended stays in the area. One aim is to promote Beer as a multi-option destination offering days on the beach, days walking the coast path and days at the major attractions all connected by walking routes. Camper vans are particularly poorly catered for in Beer and we would look at options, in association with the camp site to offer more short term camper van facilities.

The overall aim is for BPC to promote and facilitate the provision of a wider range of entertainment opportunities through private or public/private partnerships utilising the redeveloped facilities. Through a more diverse range of attractions such as concerts, specialist shops and casual dining on and around the beach it is hoped to encourage visitors and locals to stay in the village longer and more often benefiting all commercial establishments in the village.

Responsibilities and costs retained by EDDC

EDDC will maintain its responsibility for road and footpath cleaning and public litter bin and dog bin emptying. BPC currently provide for just over 50% of the road sweepers costs with EDDC providing the balance.

Clarification is needed regarding any initial or future capital contributions from EDDC for either major redevelopment or new projects. The transfer of assets includes the transfer of revenue cost and income. This does not impinge on EDDC capital budgets. It is anticipated that Beer will still be eligible for capital funding as appropriate and in proportion to its size and need.

The responsibility related to any capital works required on the beach as a result of storm damage or compliance with the shore line management plan will remain with EDDC as Beer's share of EDDC capital budget and in the understanding that any works would be substantially funded by DEFRA as the responsible authority. The same rationale would apply to the cliffs and clarification is needed regarding insurance against cliff falls.

The Coastal Communities Team opportunity

The CCT initiative promoted by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) builds upon the government's localism policy which, among other aims supports the transfer of responsibilities and assets to the lowest appropriate governing body, in our case BPC. The object of this is to put decision making on local issues in the community.

The timing of the CCT initiative and BPC proposal for the transfer of assets puts Beer in an almost perfect position. Transfer of assets gives control of assets to BPC enabling it to develop local solutions to local problems, the capital elements of which can be supported by CCT funding. In addition to the benefit to Beer and the surrounding area, the transfer of liabilities will also allow EDDC to reduce its operating cost over the next 4 years in line with its need to achieve £2.6m of revenue savings by 2021

Assets to transfer

The beach and all its operations, concessions and leases

Charlie's Yard and all that property not owned by the Fishermen's association.

Jubilee Gardens and play park including all structures and facilities

Jubilee toilets

The Cliff Top car park

The Beach Court car park

Starre bank and the associated areas

Flower bed in the entrance to Central car park

Responsibility for maintenance of the grounds of the old cemetery